



For Judges and Attorneys Handling Child Protective Services Cases

May 24, 2018

Video Conferencing to Increase Family and Youth Engagement

The Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) manages a **video conferencing project (VC)** between the courts presiding over child abuse and neglect cases, the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)/Child Protection Services (CPS), and the residential placement facilities contracted to DFPS, **to facilitate communication between the children placed in these facilities and the judges** overseeing their cases. VC calls are conducted over a secure link, which differentiates the OCA's video conferencing from a public network such as Skype or FaceTime.

The original purpose of the VC project was to **enable children involved in CPS cases to participate in their court hearings** without them being physically present in the courtroom, since appearing in person can be difficult for children due to placement location, transportation barriers, and the court's inability to accommodate the child's needs.

Now, **Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)** program offices can be set up with VC equipment to accommodate private VC between children and others. This allows CASAs to conduct a virtual meeting with a child placed outside the child's home jurisdiction and provides CASA the opportunity to **facilitate visits with siblings and/or family members**, when appropriate, as well as with the child's CASA. With 102 placement facilities, 44 courts, and 42 CASA program offices video-enabled around Texas, technology is **helping to overcome the geographical barriers** that would otherwise prevent kids from connecting with courts and appropriate people on their cases.

There is **no cost for the VC system setup or use**. Any **court, CASA program office, or residential placement facility** interested in using the VC system is only required to have a computer or smart device with a camera and an internet connection. The Office of Court Administration can provide a web cam free of charge for VC.

For more information and to register, please visit this link: www.txcourts.gov/programs-services/video-conferencing.

"Video conferencing gives children an opportunity to meet their caseworkers, CASA, Judges, and other people working on their cases face-to-face. It also gives children the opportunity to participate in their court hearings. Additionally, I believe it makes children feel that they are more involved in decision-making in their cases."

– Andy Orr, Randall County Domestic Relations

"We are currently using video conferencing to accommodate sibling visits for one of our cases. The children are in three different placements across Texas. We are helping to facilitate these visits to ensure that the siblings are getting to see each other weekly. Mom also attends the visits at our office so that she can see her children on the screen and talk to them. Before using this system, Mom was not able to talk to the children regularly and the siblings were not having contact. It is very important for children to be able to maintain a connection to family when appropriate. We are grateful that we have been able to facilitate visitation with the videoconferencing system."

– Lara Escobar, Executive Director, Amarillo Area CASA

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